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THE GREATEST OF MIRACLES

STRATFORD DE REDCLIFFE



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THE
GREATEST OF MIRACLES.

THE GREATEST OF MIRACLES.

'Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.'

HEB. xiii. 8.

BY

VISCOUNT STRATFORD DE REDCLIFFE,

P.C., K.G., G.C.B.



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Dedicated

TO

ANTHONY, EARL OF SHAFTESBURY, K.G.

WHO,

IN THE TRUE SPIRIT OF JESUS,

HAS DEVOTED

HIS ENTIRE LIFE, WITH ALL ITS ENERGIES,

TO

THE RELIEF AND IMPROVEMENT

OF

OUR POOREST CLASSES.

THE GREATEST OF MIRACLES.

ERRATA.

Page 3, line 12, *for* declares Himself, *read* states that He
declared Himself.

„ 11, line 11, *omit* the feet of.

„ 39, last line, *read* record.

„ 43, line 1, *read* records.

„ 65, „ 11, *read* tormentors.

„ 101, „ 7, *for* prediction, *read* predictions.

of miracles.

If this be true, as there are cogent reasons for believing, it is a truth of no mean importance, and one which cannot be brought too strongly into the light of evidence. Far am I from thinking that I have ability or knowledge enough to treat so vast a subject with the

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THE GREATEST OF MIRACLES.

THE words which appear above may well excite curiosity to learn who or what is meant by the *greatest of miracles*. A question of this purport is natural, and the answer, in my opinion, is obvious. It is to be found in the life and person of Christ. Jesus Himself, Jesus in His human character, taken exclusively as a man, is that reality which may be justly entitled *the greatest of miracles*.

If this be true, as there are cogent reasons for believing, it is a truth of no mean importance, and one which cannot be brought too strongly into the light of evidence. Far am I from thinking that I have ability or knowledge enough to treat so vast a subject with the

desired success. But as it happens,—I scarcely know why,—to occupy an active place in my inner apprehension, I will not shrink from contributing what little of either I possess, to its elucidation.

I.

It may be advisable to begin by showing that I have a clear conception of what is meant in general parlance by the word '*miracle*.' My definition of it, to use a precise form of words, would be, a visible or intelligible effect produced with a declared intention by superhuman means—that is, in a manner not falling within the known range of man's capacity. Under this head more immediately come the miracles attributed generally in Holy Writ to prophets and other inspired persons, and pre-eminently to the great legislator of the Israelites. It was, no doubt, natural and reasonable that any one, who pretended to a direct intercourse with Heaven, should display miraculous powers in proof that what he assumed was neither a deception nor an illusion. Some requisition of

this kind was not in use among the chosen people alone. The magi in Persia, and the diviners in Egypt, be it remembered, were expected to give proof of their commission from above by working miracles. Christ Himself, as we all know, complied with this expectation, and founded in part the claim of a new doctrine to general acceptance on His possession of supernatural powers. St. Matthew, recording in his Gospel our Saviour's answer to John the Baptist's inquiry who He really was, declares Himself the true Messiah by appealing to the cures He had effected, the blind who had received their sight from Him, and the dead He had restored to life.

From time to time, indeed, such acts of supernatural power have been treated by sceptics as popular illusions, or the inventions of heated enthusiasts. Some modern philosophers have even rejected them as impossibilities, opposed alike to the established laws of nature and to the acknowledged attributes of the Almighty Creator. That a belief in them is necessary to a full acceptance of Christianity

forms no part of my argument. At the same time I see no sufficient reason for entertaining a serious doubt of their reality, a doubt, by the way, which could hardly become a settled opinion without invalidating the whole structure of the Gospel history. The miracles ascribed therein to our Redeemer, and related circumstantially, are numerous, to say nothing of many more which are only mentioned in general terms. If any one of them is recognized as true, its value as evidence of a Divine commission is surely equal for that purpose to the whole number. Supposing them to have been the offspring of popular enthusiasm, or of individual design, how are we to explain the circumstances with which they are invested? Why should they have been so unnecessarily multiplied? Why, in some instances, should they have been stated with so much detail? Why should they have been performed in such manner as to lie open to the test of the senses, with a full exposure to detection by the jealous observation of interested multitudes? Surely, a deceiver, whether as agent

or as narrator, would have narrowed rather than extended the field of imposture, knowing that every fresh case of deception would afford an additional chance of discovery. Nor is it by any means probable that mere popular credulity, under the excitement of any imaginable stimulant, should have furnished a collection of miracles, not only unnecessary in point of number, but wholly without example in the history of mankind. It would seem at the same time that the correctness of my fundamental proposition, namely, that Jesus Himself was the greatest of miracles, is in no degree affected by our believing in the truth of those miraculous acts of His with which the Gospels abound. Miraculous proofs of a Divine revelation were evidently required for the reception of Christ's ministry, and they fulfilled that purpose by their effect on contemporary minds ; the double effect indeed of obtaining a host of followers, and of rousing that jealousy which ended in the consummation of our Saviour's sacrifice.

II.

Jesus Himself in the light of a personal miracle is quite an independent, and it is not, perhaps, too much to say, an all-sufficient evidence of His own truth and the Divine character of that faith which He promulgated by His life on earth, and consecrated for all time by His death upon the cross. It may be safely asserted that there is no real surplusage between those miracles which rest on the testimony of the Evangelists, and that less palpable, but far more comprehensive miracle which Jesus Himself exhibited in His character, person, and life. Not only were both, in their separate spheres, desirable and efficient with a certain difference of time, but they were also calculated to have a lasting influence in favour of the Gospel's reception and subsequent propagation through many successive centuries, and according to present appearances, through those which are to follow.

III.

The Divine subject of these remarks, in order to have justice done to His claims on our admiration and belief, must be considered with reference to the past and to the future, as well as to the brief, though pregnant period of His manifestation on earth. He lived, spiritually, in prophecy before He lived in the flesh; and He still lives in that community of Christians which justify their profession of the name by a sincere faith, and a practice virtually faithful. From the consistency of word and fact in all that essentially concerns the Messiah during the two first of those very unequal periods, are to be elicited full and satisfactory proofs that Jesus possessed of right the title to that unshared and unsurpassable character. After more than eighteen centuries of yet unfinished struggle with the Powers of Darkness, He stands before us in the light of His own person as He stood in the reflection of His miraculous acts before the multitudes who

witnessed their display. To use His own words, with a change of form not altering their sense, the perception of this truth is to be found in a sufficient knowledge of Scripture, and a just estimate of the power of God. The pen that traces them here is not held by a priestly or professional hand. If this circumstance be deemed to carry with it, as, doubtless, it does, a want of authority, its freedom from every bias generated by grooved habits of thought, or interested views, may, perhaps, be allowed to atone for the defect. At this very time many public journals intermix the more suitable topics of their vocation with theological disputes, and questions of ritualistic nicety, which, however learned or however ingenious, appear to many but little calculated, even if they are not altogether misplaced, to promote reverential feelings, or to advance the interests of genuine religion. The Christian scheme is too beautiful in its compact but graceful symmetry, too vast in its application, and far too vital in the importance of its final results to be trammelled to excess with conventional ornaments, or to be transfigured,

not into a brighter radiance, so much as into a fantastic tissue of forms and colours tending rather to the splendour of the outward than to the efficiency of the inward church. But I am unwilling to narrow an argument of conclusive breadth into a partial, fragmentary field of opinion, or to give it a polemical, it may be, a mere ephemeral colouring. Content with a passing allusion to one among the many questions of the day, I enter without further preliminaries upon that portion of my undertaking which stands first in the order of time.

IV.

It is of course from that wonderful collection of writings, which we call the Old Testament, that the prophetic evidences of Jesus, as being the true Messiah, are exclusively derived. The question of their general inspiration has little to dread from those whose minds are so constituted as to render every matter not tangible by their senses an object of doubt, if not of positive denial. It is enough for a purpose,

which may be kept clear of notorious controversy without impairing its efficiency, to view them under the manifold aspect of qualities which the most confirmed sceptic would hardly venture to dispute. Can it be matter of surprise that writings which give the most positive account of events, separated indeed by long intervals of time, but intimately connected by the relations of cause and effect, should contain predictions explanatory, so to say, of the origin and meaning of their sequence, and competent thereby to '*vindicate the ways of God to man?*' But of this more hereafter, when I shall take occasion to enlarge in some degree upon the peculiar, pervading, and consistent characteristics of the elder testament; upon those also of the select nation, whose literature, whether historical, legislative, or prophetic, is virtually comprised in those sacred books, and even, if it may be done without presumption, upon those conceptions of the Almighty and His creation, as known to us, which seem to offer an *à priori* argument in favour of the great and benevolent scheme of man's prefigured redemption.

V.

The first link in that series of prophetic intimations, which point through distant ages to the advent of a Messiah, is not so vague but it strikes on the understanding now, as, no doubt, it kindled hope in the bosoms of our ejected progenitors. Every one must feel with our great dramatic poet the charm of '*mercy seasoning justice.*' The entrance to Paradise was about to close against the victims of disobedience, when Adam heard from God's own voice that the feet of the woman's seed should bruise the serpent's head ; and to him, who knew not then the venom of such reptiles in the lower world, but knew too well whose poison had infected the ear of Eve, those words could hardly fail to convey a sense, however faint, of comfort and resignation. The serpent, be it remembered, was Satan in disguise ; the woman typified that virgin by whom the appointed Saviour was to appear in human shape.

The second link was that Divine covenant

made with Noah after he came out of the ark. Although it expressed no distinct reference to a Redeemer, it declared the Almighty's resolution to preserve mankind from a repetition of the recent calamity, and therefore to maintain the pre-existing need of a Messiah, while it left open to future ages the apprehension of a final destruction by fire.

Far more explicit was that covenant of equal sanctity which was made in later days with the patriarch Abraham. The promise then given to him by the Almighty was amply redeemed in the sequel. The powers of production were revived by Divine interposition. When Sarah gave birth to a son, both she and her husband were of an age which precluded the hope of offspring, and so marked a proof of God's favour was doubtless to them a pledge for the accomplishment of those yet fuller promises which it lay with time to realise. Descendants numerous as the stars of heaven were to issue from a feeble stock, and in them were *all the nations of the earth to be blessed*. There is no distinct mention of a Redeemer in this or in other passages re-

lating to the great patriarch ; but the test of unlimited obedience to the Divine will, which followed after an interval of several years, may well be taken to foreshadow the real sacrifice of an only son, in whose person the promise of an universal blessing was subsequently accomplished. The particular promise, be it observed, was given as an immediate consequence of the self-devoting act, whereas the more general one, which preceded it, originated in nothing more special than the sincere piety, devout conduct, and undoubting faith of Abraham. Those qualities operated even to the advantage of Hagar and her son Ishmael, with a difference of degree which marked the pre-eminence of Isaac, the free-born, in God's favour.

VI.

The prophecy of Balaam as recorded in the book of Numbers, may be quoted as going a step further in the same line of expectation. The words, though figurative, are eminently significant : *I shall see Him, but not now ; I shall*

behold Him, but not nigh: 'there shall come a star out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel.' (Num. xxiv. 17.) Then, again, in almost immediate succession, there follows this clear intimation of a *person* to be invested with power, to which, indeed, the image of a 'sceptre' was already an introduction, '*out of Jacob shall come He that shall have dominion.*' There seems to be an allusion in this passage to Jacob's blessing on his son Judah, as recorded in the forty-ninth chapter of Genesis, where *Shiloh* is named; but as the true meaning of that word is disputed by respectable authorities, it would not be convenient to lay any stress upon it here.

The prophetic testimony of Job may be cited with more confidence. Whenever, or by whom, the book that bears his name was written or put together, the well-known passage, consisting of three verses, in the nineteenth chapter, and beginning with the words, '*I know that my Redeemer liveth,*' carries conviction to the thoughtful mind.

VII.

We must go to the Psalmody of David for a more abundant store of prophecy pointing undeniably to the future Christ. The very first verse of the twenty-second Psalm contains one of the last utterances of our Saviour when suffering the agonies of the cross: '*My God! my God! why hast thou forsaken me?*' In another part of the same well-known Psalm, we find a still clearer anticipation of what literally occurred in the last scene of Christ's life on earth: '*They pierced my hands and my feet; they part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture.*' Observe that the punishment of the cross, of which the piercing of the hands and feet was a necessary part, had no prototype in the days of King David. Then as to the character of Christ's ministry; '*He hath not despised, nor abhorred the low estate of the poor: He hath not hid His face from him, but when he called unto Him, He heard him.*' '*The poor shall eat and be satisfied.*' Then, again, as to the extent of His government: '*All the ends of the*

world shall remember themselves and be turned unto the Lord.' 'For the kingdom is the Lord's, and He is the Governor among the people.' The forty-fifth Psalm may also be cited as in part addressed to a personage whose qualities are so described as to have found their reality in Him whose doctrine and ministry form the subject of the Gospels. The words are very remarkable : *'Full of grace are thy lips, because God hath blessed thee for ever.'* *'Gird thee with thy sword upon thy thigh, O thou most mighty, according to thy worship and renown. Ride on, because of the word of truth, of meekness, and righteousness.'* Then comes the most significant passage of all : *'Thy seat, O God, endureth for ever ; the sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre—wherefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.'* It may be well to pause here a moment. To whom but the Christ can this last expression point ? Who in the whole range of history can be addressed without blasphemy under the title of Deity, save Jesus Christ, whose life was one of perfect holiness, whose character one of undeviating truth ; who could

say of Himself, 'Before Abraham was, I am ;' who was hailed by others as the Son of God, and whose resurrection from the grave left no room for even a shadow of doubt ?

In another Psalm we find, 'Kiss the son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.' (Ps. ii. 12.) The nine verses of the seventy-second Psalm have every appearance of anticipating the reign of Christ : '*His dominion shall be also from the one sea to the other, and from the flood unto the world's end.*'

In the 11th verse of the 16th Psalm are the following words, which are so pointedly significant as to seem incapable of application save to one, namely, to Him who in after ages yielded to death only to renew life while his body was yet untainted by decay : '*Thou shalt not leave my soul in hell, neither shalt thou suffer thy Holy One to see corruption.*'

The Book of Common Prayer shows that our Church, by its selections for the service of the days appropriated to the memory of Christ,

considers other portions of the Psalms as bearing a prophetic meaning with respect to Him. But to quote them here by more than a passing allusion, would be a work of supererogation, and, therefore, well spared in an argument which ought not to be drawn out into any unnecessary length. One pregnant exception may, however, be allowed. It is from the hundred and eighth Psalm, '*The same stone which the builders refused, is become the head-stone in the corner. This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvellous in our eyes.*'

VIII.

Let us now give ear to the voice of a prophet, whose lowest accents were like the rushing of the blast before thunder, or, when highest, like the thunder itself, as it rolls along the lightning's track. What is the language of Isaiah? '*The Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel.*' Again, '*Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name*

shall be called, Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end.' (Isa. ix. 6, 7.) Still more remarkable, as being personally particular, is the whole 53rd chapter of Isaiah's prophecies. A few lines of it may be transcribed as a reminder of the rest. '*He hath no form, nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.*' '*He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.*' '*Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.*' '*He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities.*' '*He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter.*' '*He made his grave with the wicked and with the rich in his death, because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.*' '*He shall feed his flock like a shepherd, he shall gather the lambs with his arm,*' &c.

Observe in what relates to the person of Messiah how the language of the prophet and of the psalmist respectively discriminates between

the spiritual and the corporeal characteristics of Christ : '*Full of grace are thy lips,*' says the former, meaning, I presume, by '*lips,*' voice, expression, doctrine ; whereas the latter describes him, with respect to his personal appearance, as having '*no form, nor comeliness.*' Observe, moreover, what is told of the precursor, '*The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.*'

Other prophetic testimonies follow in the track of Isaiah. Let not the words of Jeremiah be forgotten. In the 23rd chapter of his book they stand thus : '*Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth.*' Some extracts from Daniel must close my prophetic chapter. A wonderful book is that which bears his name—wonderful in its historic as well as in its more spiritual character. Whatever clouds may have gathered round it in the rationalistic schools, they have been effectually dispersed by the pen of a learned and judicious

writer, high in position at Oxford, and high in reputation everywhere.

IX.

That 'Daniel was truthful—that his book, though seemingly patched together, was really single in composition, and that the prophet was throughout its author in the Chaldee as well as in the Hebrew part—I readily accept on such esteemed authority. The historical events related or referred to by Daniel are so limited in comparison with the prophetic and miraculous portions of his writing, that the whole presents to our minds at first sight the idea of a fanciful rather than that of a serious narrative. A closer inquiry and a wider spread of knowledge appear to warrant a very different opinion. This is the more important as the authenticity and credibility of the whole book are auxiliary to our reliance on that part which most concerns our faith in Jesus and the ultimate issue of Christianity. To have it fairly made out by cogent reasoning, that, of the four great empires

shadowed out in Nebuchadnezzar's dream, three have undergone their predicted destinies, and that the prophecy relating to the fourth, though in part accomplished, has still a portion in reserve, must be a continual source of satisfaction to the Christian world. To this we may add the vision vouchsafed to Daniel himself—the vision of the seventy weeks—at the close of which period the true Messiah, previously typified by the 'stone cut without hands, which smote the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth,' was 'cut off' 'causing the sacrifice and the oblation to cease.' It is no matter of conjecture, but a fact, which may be confidently asserted, that events have come to pass in essential accordance with Daniel's forewarning. We are thus encouraged to entertain 'a sure and certain hope' that in their final issue they will bring into full light the reality of his inspiration from above, and here the very words of the prophet may find a suitable and efficient place.

'In the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be

destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever.' (Dan. ii. 44.) 'The greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him.' (Dan. vii. 27.) 'From the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks.' (Dan. ix. 25.)

X.

In a collective point of view the prophecies relating to the eventual redemption of mankind by means of a Messiah, may be classed under the several heads of general, special, and personal. Those of the first class belong to the earliest records of our race; those of a personal kind stand out most prominently in the pages of Isaiah. Upon the whole, it would seem that the grand reinstating scheme of Providence was pur-

posely unfolded by degrees, either in deference to the increasing knowledge and expanding faculties of man, or according as fresh circumstances gave occasion for some further step towards the conclusive revelation. Whichever of the two suppositions may be preferred, the graduation itself is impressive, as showing a continuous intention more apparent as time advanced, and ever fraught with unlimited benevolence. The presumption that such a scheme existed from the very beginning may, I imagine, be shown in some degree by argument *à priori*, and I have it in view to state my reasons for thinking so.


XI.

Since we are indebted to the Old Testament for our knowledge of the prophecies, a few sentences may be well employed in developing the character of a scripture invested with such high and durable authority. To do this is only to redeem a pledge antecedently given, and to state more explicitly the grounds of an opinion

which in the passage referred to was little more than a passing allusion. I repeat my share in the conviction that apart from the question of their entire inspiration, the pages of the Bible possess, on the whole, indisputable claims on our reverence, and, as to essential points, on our submissive belief.

Mankind from their very nature must even in barbarous times have had amongst them minds animated by a strong desire to find out the origin of their own being, and to trace back to its fountain-head that order of things by which they were surrounded. From their senses they derived the perception of all material objects; their instincts led them in some important respects to make a right use of the knowledge thus conveyed to them; their faculties, when brought into full exercise, took a far wider range. Under their comprehensive influence the present became little more than a standing place for reviewing the past and penetrating the future. With the sole exception of the Bible, what book, or set of writings, calculated to meet the requirements of beings so highly gifted, does any

nation upon earth possess? Competitive accounts of the origin and earlier stages of human existence may possibly have been swept away by the scythe of time or the destructive convulsions of nature; but faint indeed, if they survive at all, are the known traces of any such memorials. Egypt and China have their pretensions, of which, however, there is no proof sufficient to except them from the foregoing remark. Our curiosity on this, the most interesting of subjects, with the sole exception of our final destination, can only have recourse to the book of Genesis; and there, if we encounter particulars which cannot be tested by our actual experience or habitual modes of thought, we also find a most impressive picture of all that in principle is most essential for us to know. The creation of the universe, including that of man, is there ascribed to one Supreme and Personal Intelligence. That self-existing Power is shown by acts to have attributes of which benevolence stands among the foremost, carrying with it obedience, as a necessary condition of its exercise, because the merciful system of an om-



nipotent and omniscient Being could not be realized without submission to His declared will on the part of creatures endued with the faculties of reason and conscience.

XII.

The attributes, by the way, of omniscience and omnipotence have been challenged by sceptics as being at variance with much in the conditions of life and the powers of nature which bear an appearance of evil. Even the benevolence of a Creator, to whom knowledge and power in full perfection are attributed, has been brought into question with reference to the supposed imperfections of our world, and the sufferings to which its inhabitants are exposed. It cannot be denied that the ordinary course of nature is at times interrupted by such destructive occurrences as storm and earthquake, flood and conflagration, or that animal life is subject in various degrees to pain and sickness, to the infirmities of age, to the terrible ravages of pestilence and famine,

that the weak are victims to the strong, and that nothing obvious to the senses is exempt from decay and final dissolution. But I venture to submit that admissions of this kind are far from being conclusive. 'Partial evil,' to use the words of a well-known poet, may in effect be 'universal good.' One may reasonably presume that there are impossibilities in the relations of things as well as in the weakness of agents. The most powerful benevolence may have to select for the accomplishment of its purpose a principle, like that of gravitation, on which must depend the subordinate, but indispensable, parts of the scheme, and some, if not all, of those parts may derive from their obedience to the paramount law a bias attended with exceptional consequences of local or temporary evil. If this be so, it must be allowed to carry with it a certain limitation of omnipotence, but only as to the means of accomplishment, and not to the prejudice of any intended and ultimate result. The human architect in building a house endeavours to combine the three main points of security, convenience, and appearance; but what is re-

quired for one of them may be attainable only by curtailing in some degree the completeness of the others. In vegetation, that lovely department of nature, what more delightful than the union of colour, scent, and flavour? But chemists inform us that the same element lies at the root of those attractions, and whenever one of them is raised to stronger effect by artificial culture, the others fall off in proportion. These instances are cited merely to show that in sundry fields, both of nature and of art, relations exist which have the effect of throwing more or less into shade the component qualities of an object when any one of them in particular acquires a marked ascendancy.

In logic and in science we are taught to argue from the known to the unknown. Is it then unreasonable to infer from what the visible objects of creation send up to our senses, and through them to our understanding, that the word omnipotence must be taken as limited to the extent suggested above, and consequently that benevolence itself issuing from an Almighty source can only attain its purpose

in full by the occasional use of means attended with temporary pain or other kinds of evil ?

XIII.

What is thus to be said of omnipotence applies, even perhaps with greater force, to the cognate attribute of omniscience. Unlimited knowledge cannot fail to appreciate beforehand the ultimate result as well as the means required for its attainment. An eminent writer has pronounced knowledge to be power, but he spoke of power as exercised by man, and in that sense, no doubt, his opinion was correct. But with all becoming reverence we may conceive of Divine power as differing from Divine knowledge, in so far as the former has to deal with effects modified by their relation to a ruling principle, whereas the latter is an attribute independent of action, and consequently not subject to any considerations derived from it.

The Creator, therefore, being omniscient, must have known in what respects the conditions of His creation would prove inadequate,

and, *à priori*, it is natural to suppose that His inherent benevolence would provide a remedy for the defect, in what manner unavoidable has been already explained, in so far as explanation on such a subject is consistent with becoming reverence.

Grand, indeed, were these ideas, forming, as we may presume, the foundations of that unparalleled fabric which is gradually foreshadowed in the Old, and realised to the comfort of millions in the New Testament. They usher us into a palace of wonders. Creation, its expanding progress from the inanimate to the vegetable, to the animal, to the reasoning life in man, reflecting the image of his Maker—the manifestation of God not only in His works, but in person—the fall and doom of His most favoured creatures—the hope, however faint and far-distant, springing from the bosom of despair—the universal degradation of mankind till piety took refuge in a single breast—the deluge—the renewal of our race under promises—the dispersion of its increasing numbers—the origin of the chosen people—the miraculous accomplish-

ment of their predicted greatness—and from the very days of their hold on Divine favour, the promulgation, we may almost call it, of a creed embracing the whole of mankind, and opening to all the gates of everlasting life.

XIV.

Such is the backbone, as we may figuratively term it, of the Scriptural narrative. How are we to account for a series of events not less wonderful in its course than sublime in its origin? How came it to pass that one small corner of the earth should alone have given birth to so pure and exalted an idea of the Creative Power, or that one very small and otherwise insignificant portion of the earth's inhabitants should have maintained through so many ages a faith which placed them in a state of invidious separation, and often of perilous hostility, with all their neighbours? Does the world's history present another example of such consistency in the origin and issue of a long succession of events, and also in the relation of those events to

each other, though in some instances wearing an appearance the reverse of their ultimate effect, and retaining in the very cup of wrath an element of revival, which not only repaired the mischiefs of apostasy, but operated in favour of the predestined revelation ?

XV.

No time is specified as having been that of the creation. We read that in the beginning, whenever that was, the creative act was the act of God, and that the elements then created were not at once brought into order. The duration of the chaotic period is not recorded. It may have occupied an indefinite number of ages. But we are told that the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. Such movement implied an ulterior purpose, which was probably brought into action when the Almighty said, '*Let there be light!*' The under-workings of the Spirit were not manifested till then. What followed? A succession of objects marked by a significant graduation, and tending by a chain

of consequences to the profit of mankind, sinful indeed, but nevertheless the crowning point of the creation.

XVI.

Looking through the letter to the spirit and effective meaning of the Biblical compositions, where but in them do we find an explanation of what is termed evil in this world? In a material sense, the calamity of the place or of the hour—the event that brings down misery upon a whole district, and plunges its inhabitants into a sea of blood and tears—may prove in the sequel a source of happiness to millions—the starting-point of a great prosperity. But moral evil—the evil resulting from sin—has no such compensation, and ‘the strength of sin is the law’—the law being God’s will, and sin any act knowingly opposed to it. But the Scriptures, in showing this, show also the infinity of Divine mercy, by foreshadowing the advent of a Redeemer, destined in the fulness of time to crush the serpent’s head. Pregnant with awful and yet with hopeful thoughts is this primeval truth

which in Genesis is draped out in attractive colours, and forms in fact the kernel, so to say, of the forbidden fruit.

To the Bible we must have recourse for the sublimest conceptions of the Godhead: first, as to its unity; then as to its personal nature; then again as to the variety, perfection, and character of its attributes; and out of this infinite grandeur an awful holiness, a stern though ever open beneficence, and truthfulness incapable of change.

Nor do the Sacred Writings disclose the mere existence and creative action of the Almighty, but exhibit with unmistakable clearness the relation in which the most favoured class of His creatures stand towards Him; namely, those of dependence, devotion, and gratitude, with their respective duties, whether of exclusive worship, of submissive affection, or of unswerving rectitude. These matters of supreme importance may be sometimes conveyed to the apprehension in forms of indirect or allegorical meaning; but the inner spirit breaks through the integument, and makes, perhaps, from that

circumstance a more effective impression on the mind.

XVII.

It may be said that in the historical records of all countries reverence for the Deity, however misconceived, is more or less displayed ; but among the peculiarities of the Old Testament is the constant, undoubting reference of everything, almost without exception, to the supreme authority of God. Ordinances, enterprises, conquests, humiliations, wrathful inflictions, compassionate recoveries—all these, and more, are made to originate expressly in the Divine will. An ever-wakeful Providence presides over the march of events, and the history of a people, long since dispersed and disestablished, but still held together by the cord of religious institutions, stands prominently out in the varied character of its successive dispensations.

The earlier parts of the Bible, as we all know, contain repeated accounts of the most extraordinary events, of miraculous actions, of Divine interpositions ; of things, in short, which

are not only without example in our days, but which the scientific explorers of nature find it difficult to reconcile with the phenomena of their researches. The most incredulous philosopher must, however, be struck with the confidence of tone, and sometimes with the circumstantial form of narrative, with which the most astonishing occurrences are related, and so related as to command the belief of successive generations, and to be welded into the whole tissue of a nation's existence. The description of the deluge and its attendant circumstances is, perhaps, the most remarkable instance of these peculiarities. Much, however, as they still leave to faith, traditions in other countries than Palestine, and even some natural vestiges of a widespread destruction caused by an outbreak of waters, appear to offer concurrent testimony, far, indeed, from conclusive in itself, but at least sufficient to forbid a hasty imputation of falsehood to the Mosaic narrative.

XVIII.

Notwithstanding the exclusive patriotism which marked so strongly the character of the Israelites, notwithstanding the habitual state of interested hostility, which they cherished towards their foreign neighbours, the result in some cases of a Divine promise, in others of fear, in all of religious faith, there are traces of humanity superior to the general practice of Asia, in their laws and institutions, as set forth in the sacred volume. The kindly reception of strangers, the establishment of cities of refuge, the periodical emancipation of slaves, the social position of women, the considerate treatment of cattle, are all expressive signs of a sentiment or principle, call it as you will, which recommends the Bible to civilized countries at every period, and strengthens its title to the highest place in their confidence. These instances, be it remembered, of a large and liberal policy, taken out of the range of custom, and fixed as portions of a system of law, were rules of conduct enforced

with the sanction of religion amongst a very limited population, whose minds might well be narrowed by their persuasion of being a chosen people, and the fact of their being separated from all others by a rampart of forms and ceremonies prescribed by Divine authority. We cannot overlook the fact that wholesale acts of cruelty appear from time to time in the Scripture narrative, but they may fairly be ascribed to individual wilfulness, departing from the spirit of the Law, and not by any means to the character of the Law itself.

This tribute to the comparative humanity of the Jewish laws may require some degree of reserve. There was, at least, one case of extreme severity in that code. The penalty for uncircumcision was death; and in some instances a milder temperament appears to have marked the legislation of Egypt. We should not, however, forget that circumcision was part of the Divine Covenant with Abraham, and therefore the omission of that rite may have been regarded by Moses as an act of open rebellion to the will of God.

The Old Testament being essentially a record

and representative of all that in origin, history, legislation, manners, and creed, belonged to that people, the coincidence therein of such thorough exclusiveness with marks so striking of a large and liberal humanity stamps it with a character, which, to say the least, harmonizes with the highest claim attached to it by national opinion. More than this, the kindred character, both of the Book and of the people, bears every appearance of being traceable to that conception of the Deity, which has given to a province, or little more than a province, of Syria, an amount of moral influence superior to that of Rome, with all its territorial conquests; of Greece, with all its glories of art and literature, of oratory, science, and philosophy. The light, thrown by these peculiarities, each reciprocally on the other, might lead us far, but the mere statement of them is sufficient for the object at present in view.

XIX.

Considering the length of time occupied by the several writings which form, when taken collectively, the Old Testament, it is not only

remarkable, but simply wonderful, that the same golden thread of consistency should be visible throughout. Like the Nile, whose fountain-head even now is an object of conjecture rather than of knowledge, it illuminates the whole space through which it passes, and assimilates the successive parts, notwithstanding their natural diversity, with its continuous fructifying course. To offer examples of this inspiring and inspired quality of the Sacred Book would be unjust to the millions who enjoy a household acquaintance with its contents. I admit that parts of it here and there lie open to objection. What of that? It is not too much to say that in every product of nature there is something which may be set aside without injury to its usefulness; nay, more, which must in numberless ways be cast off before that usefulness can be realized. Even the diamond must be stripped of its rough exterior before it can shine out with the fulness of its latent brilliancy. Now, what is nature but the work of God, and is it not therefore folly to depreciate the ark or tabernacle of holiness be-

cause it partakes of the imperfection belonging to the substance of its construction? Is the soul of man the less a living spirit because it is associated with a body subject to decay?

XX.

Much as my argument thus far has been swollen by the requirements of the subject, I am unwilling to pass on without noticing one more important characteristic of the Bible, namely, the candour which pervades it from beginning to end. There is no appearance of concealment used as a tribute to national vanity. The infirmities, the humiliations, nay, even the crimes, of individuals admired for their high qualities, or renowned for their achievements, are stated without reserve, and sometimes visited with just reproach. The nation itself, when failing in its duties, or false to its convictions, is neither sheltered from them by the annalist, nor flattered by the voice of prophecy into a state of self-excusing complacency. Frank and faithful alike to the causes of hard affliction and the

means of penitential recovery, are the records of the one and the anticipations of the others. It cannot be necessary to cite in full the cases of Moses, Saul, David, Solomon, and Jeroboam, to say nothing of the patriarchal deceptions. But it may be worth while to ask how it is that such notable peculiarities, such elements of conscientious truthfulness can pervade the Bible without suggesting, in concert with other circumstances, a conviction of its Divine origin, and the perception of a final purpose beneficial to mankind? It might by possibility be said that they were the natural results of the Jewish belief in a Supreme Intelligence possessing all the attributes of perfect self-existing power; but whence came the knowledge of that perfection, as entertained by defective beings in the midst of objects suggesting at every moment ideas of incompleteness and decay, if not from God Himself, the source of all knowledge, the first, the final, cause of all dependent things?

XXI.

Such may surely be taken as a fair account of the Book, the Book of books, in the most striking features of its earlier and largest division. Its literary merits alone would place it high among the records of human thought, in some respects it may be affirmed, on their pinnacle. All the excellencies of composition crop out in various parts of the collection from a stubborn and rugged surface, through the mists of time, and the uncertain medium of translation.

Science, I imagine, owes but little to the Hebrew writers. Their science lay in recognition of the First Cause, and not in the investigation of secondary causes. Their poetry was deficient in the graces of metrical harmony, but in the powers of original conception, and unfettered grasp, it is equal, and often more than equal, to the noblest flights of their pagan contemporaries. In one, perhaps the most generally effective, of literary qualities, they especially excel. They have left no examples of the known conventional forms of tragedy and comedy, but the dramatic principle seems to have been instinctive

to their modes of composition. Now, what do we mean by the dramatic principle if not the abstract idea of that which may be fairly expressed by representative reality ? Here, then, we perceive another sign of habitual truthfulness in the character and writings of those who either expounded their religious doctrines to the Hebrew population, or recorded the events of their national history. Though marks of general truthfulness do not constitute truth as to any particular dogma or statement of fact, they go far to encourage confidence, and to overcome our disinclination to accept at once as fact any unexpected novelty of a superhuman or very extraordinary kind. They smooth the road towards belief, and ought in reason to have that effect. We listen with pardonable incredulity to any unusual statement resting on the authority of a person notorious for invention or exaggeration. Ought we not, therefore, in simple consistency, to throw the claims of general truthfulness into the scale of judgment whenever any matter of importance new or unusual merits our consideration ?

XXII.

The Old Testament, although it may fitly be termed the cradle of Christianity, differs, it is well known, most essentially in certain capital respects, from the supreme revelation which succeeded it. Not only does the teaching of Jesus contrast strongly with the Levitical law, the former being as remarkable for its simplicity as the latter for the number of its feasts and onerous ceremonies, but the purely spiritual character of the one flies off, as it were, from the heavier elements of the other. In both, no doubt, there shines the prominent duty of pleasing God, but the fruits of obedience promised respectively in both, differ as much as the future from the present world.

Notwithstanding these dissimilar, or rather in appearance opponent qualities, the New Testament came in due season to be grafted on the Old. The records, laws, and customs of the Hebrew tribes, which had answered the Divine purpose of keeping that population, in

part at least, free from the hateful sin of idolatry, and making it, in figurative language, the guardian casket of a priceless jewel, became at last the means of giving effect to the great scheme of redemption. What there was of spiritual in the Jewish institutions assumed in time an universal form, including the pagan world. The bigoted hatred of those who could see in the Saviour of Mankind only a poor blaspheming mechanic, proved to be the cause of that consummation of the final sacrifice which brought eternal life once more within the reach of humanity. Those who have the most ordinary acquaintance with the Sacred Volume cannot but know that its pages contain many other outpourings of that Spirit, which, kindled by faith in God, anticipated events other than those of a religious cast. Circumstances which regarded the temporal condition of the people were objects of prophecy long before the event, and the event as recorded in history answered to the prophecy. Under this head may be classed the call of Abraham, the prosperity of Ishmael, the promised land, the sojourn of more

than four centuries in Egypt, the Babylonian captivity, and other events which it were idle to specify here.

XXIII.

It is not only with respect to its many instances of accomplished prophecy that the Hebrew history commands our interest and wonder. The beginning and succession of links in that historic chain carries with it so much of an unusual and peculiar cast, that, independent of any insight into futurity, the records of fact would alone stamp the Jewish nation with a singularity belonging to no other people. This, no doubt, was meant. Look at the 23rd chapter of Numbers. What says Balaam of the Israelites? 'Lo, the people shall dwell alone, and shall not be numbered among the nations.' A series of generations springing out of two individuals well stricken in years is no common circumstance. Such, however, was the origin of the Israelites as a nation. The name, indeed, was applied to them subsequently; but they

looked upon Abraham as their first progenitor, nor was the cause of his pre-eminence lost sight of when, after many intervening ages, the great apostle of the Gentiles preached the doctrine of salvation by faith. Notwithstanding the fluctuations of their conduct, and the vicissitudes of their condition, the Chosen People were more or less faithful to their grand conception of the Deity, and to that idea of a Divine guidance which naturally suggested the expectation of some glorious triumph in the end. Alike when David danced before the ark, when Solomon displayed his glory in the 'noiseless fabric,' and when the weeping captives refused to sing the Lord's song in a strange land, their hearts were never estranged from the true God, their affections still dwelt in the land of His promise. In these paramount respects, and also in others, which followed from the ruling principle, there was that marked consistency which we have already noticed, between the character of the people, the course of their policy, the spirit of their laws, and the genius of their literature. In each division there is a specialty which indicates purpose; in their combination we

recognise a corresponding earnestness which tells upon the judgment even to conviction.

XXIV.

We must here go back for a moment to the beginning, even to the very germ of the nation. An individual of high social position, having no equal in point of faith, became in his old age the father of a son, who in his turn gave birth to a large patriarchal family. This family, compelled by a severe scarcity, migrated into another country, and finally, after some interesting vicissitudes, settled there on lands which kept them separate from the native population. More than four centuries elapsed, when, greatly increased in numbers, a nation, giant-like, groaning under the intolerable exactions of task-masters, who feared their increasing strength and eventual resistance, they appealed to God for redress, and found a deliverer in the person of him who slew the Midianite. Favoured by Jehovah, and led by His appointed servant, they retraced the path of their ancestors, and, after vindicating their claim to the promise by

struggling through inconceivable difficulties, obtained a fixed code of laws, which continued to hold them separate for treasuring the seed and dispersing the fruit of an universal blessing. With that extraordinary system of legislation, the Israelites also obtained possession of a land which fully repaid their preparatory sacrifices, and which even to this hour is visited with enthusiasm by travellers from remote countries. There it was that Jesus, the true Messiah, began His mortal career; there entered upon His spotless ministry; and there upon the Cross completed the one last sacrifice by which we hope to attain a life of unbroken happiness.

This, surely, is a wonderful and unparalleled succession of events! Add to it, as before stated, that sublime conception of the Deity, which filled the minds even of those who preceded the establishment of the Hebrew people, and that persistent expectation which to this very day supplies a knot of union to their scattered remnant, and we cannot fail to see the hand of Providence throughout. The utmost of human contrivance has no such reach.

We must presume a necessity for '*man's*

first disobedience,' and a consequent obligation in the bosom of unlimited benevolence to redress the calamity. Such in substance appears to be the instruction conveyed to us by St. John the Evangelist, in the preliminary verses of his Gospel. Omnipotence itself may be conceived to have reasons for employing particular means with a view to the accomplishment of an appointed purpose. A single family, a separate people, a land of promise, a country of small extent, a divine system of law, together with a visible guidance and prophetic illumination, were obviously, perhaps even needfully conducive to its conservation and ultimate fulfilment. The elements of obstruction abounded on all sides from first to last. The streaming water of life, by its confinement to a narrow channel, acquired a degree of strength which it never could have attained by diffusion. I would add that the frequent and sometimes extensive apostasy of the Jewish tribes, shows how great was the difficulty of preserving a pure knowledge of the true God, and realising the intended effect of that knowledge.

XXV.

We have now to enter upon a new phase in that apparently broken, but really connected, tissue of marvels leading up to a result of unexampled grandeur and infinite benevolence. The long interval of nearly five centuries which followed between the close of the prophetic period and the birth of Jesus was a time but little calculated to cherish the traditional reliances of Palestine. It was one, with few exceptions, of misrule, corruption, invasion, subjugation, and wholesale calamity. Every neighbouring power in turn appears to have attacked Jerusalem, often deluging its streets with blood. The noble efforts made on behalf of their country by warriors and patriots of the Maccabee family shed sometimes a brilliant gleam over the desolated territory, but without any permanent effect. The Jews in general had fallen off from the strict observance of their peculiar rites. They had formed connexions and entertained habitual intercourse with hea-

thens who were wholly destitute of any participation in their peculiar traditions and religious observances. That special seat of holiness, the reconstructed Temple, was no longer open to the national worship of Jehovah. The very Holy of Holies had been polluted by the entrance of armed idolaters. Even the relief, which Palestine at length obtained, was an ignominious repose under Roman sway; and while that country was a mere province of the great empire, it owed to a Herod, miscalled Great, the completion, as it would seem, of the Temple, and with it the renewal of the Levitical worship, and the reading of Scripture in open synagogue.

From these leading circumstances of the time in question, sketched with every regard to accuracy of statement, some very probable idea may be inferred of the mental and moral condition of the Jewish people when our Divine Redeemer was manifested in the flesh. In all classes there must have been, more or less, a lowering consciousness of dependence on a foreign power, alien to them in the most important respects. Their sense of national dig-

nity could not have been much above zero. We may presume that the knowledge of their peculiar antecedents had gradually decayed amongst the masses without their acquiring any substitutes of wider range from other less sanctified quarters. Ignorance, loss of character, and corruption could hardly fail to throw them generally into the extremes of either mob-recklessness or intolerant bigotry. There existed, no doubt, at the same time in and about Jerusalem, as in other cities, a numerous light-hearted populace, susceptible of hasty impressions from any side, and prone alike to form an enthusiastic following, or to take part in a cruel persecution. The country also, it is clear, had no lack of multitudes, whose curiosity was easily excited, for whom every novelty had a special charm and upon whom a miracle was sure to exert a more than legitimate influence. Even among the higher and more educated classes there was more of the pride of ritualism than of the spirit of genuine religion. One point, if not alone, yet in single prominence, would seem to have found an ark amidst the waters of calamity which had

overflowed the land of promise. The belief in one supreme and personal Deity was still predominant in the Hebrew mind. Together with that essential article of faith, it is notorious that an expectation of some great Deliverer, Christ, or Messiah, prevailed in various degrees throughout the Jewish population ; nor, indeed, was the contemporary race of Pagans without some shadowy idea of an approaching advent, pregnant with advantage either to their own country or to mankind at large.

This picture, or rather sketch of a picture, would be too evidently incomplete if mention were not made of that smaller, but very significant, class of persons, who quietly and unobtrusively in their respective circles maintained the old religion in a true spirit of unshaken faith and devout resignation. Of such, it may be presumed, were the families, for instance, of Mary, Joseph, Zacharias, and Elisabeth, which the general relaxation of morals and faith had not reached. Reading of the Scriptures still prevailed in the principal synagogues, and commenting thereon was not improbably the prac-

tice of such families, to whom the appearance of the Messiah a little sooner or a little later could hardly fail to be a matter of habitual belief. Whether their conception of Him was derived from the prophetic anticipations, or from the actual circumstances of His birth, it differed essentially from that of the Scribes and Pharisees. The reality, which was a huge stumbling-block to the formalists, became a facility to their acceptance of Jesus in His Divine character by the less prejudiced portion of the people.

XXVI.

There is yet another circumstance which demands a passing notice at this point. Those Jews who returned to the city of David from the Babylonish captivity belonged almost exclusively to the two tribes which constituted the kingdom of Judah. The dispersion of the ten tribes, which are distinguished in history by the names of Israel and Israelites, had taken place some time before, and what in course of time became of them is still a mystery. A few scattered

individuals, or it may be families, separated from the mass of those tribes, were perhaps intermingled with the returning population, but it does not appear that they were in sufficient numbers to be marked as a distinct class. On the whole, it may be stated as an historical fact, that the people in whose ranks the man Jesus grew up were remnants of the Judah tribes, as distinguished from those of Israel, and therefore that the blood of our crucified Redeemer lies emphatically on their heads, and that the Jews, found almost everywhere in our time,—dispersed generally, but segregated into local communities, and till of late degraded, despised, and persecuted, are their unchanged and unmistakable descendants.

XXVII.

We have now to consider the Saviour Himself—the Saviour in His human character alone. Did the circumstances of His royal descent, His condition, His person, His character, His life and doctrine, respond to those scriptural

prophecies which had announced the advent of a Messiah in fulness of time? Let us call to mind that nothing could be well more humble than His birth. Wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger! His nominal father earning his livelihood by following the trade of a carpenter! It is reasonable to suppose that His own calling was the same as Joseph's from the end of His boyhood to the beginning of His ministry. To live from hand to mouth was His adopted condition. The companions of His youth could hardly have been other than those of similar position. That He was deeply conversant with the Scriptures there can be no doubt. The famous scene in the Temple, where His 'sorrowing' parents found Him when missing at the age of twelve, leaves us without a doubt on this matter. In point of education and intercourse with others it does not appear that He had any more signal advantage.

We have no surer guide than mere conjecture as to His pursuits or occupations during the eighteen or twenty years which immediately preceded the commencement of His public

ministry. The silence of the Gospels in that respect goes far to convince us that the interval presented nothing on His part to attract any attention beyond that of His family and their nearest connexions. Out of that circle there may have been little more than a confused remembrance of some extraordinary incidents relating to a child, whose identity had fallen out of notice, and whose obscurity it was natural for the parents to encourage as an escape from impending dangers. It is recorded of Mary, our Lord's mother, as an exceptional circumstance, that she 'kept all these sayings *in her heart*.' What we are told beside on the same authority is that the adolescent Redeemer 'increased in wisdom and *in stature*,' and also '*in favour with God and man*.' We learn from His own lips, child as He then was, that He felt and knew His own appointed mission: 'Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?' When later in the synagogue of Nazareth He applied the prophetic Scripture to Himself for the first time in public, the sentiment excited thereby among His audience was not that of repugnance to a

continued pretension, but of surprise and disgust that Joseph the carpenter's son, known merely as such in the whole neighbourhood, should dare to lay claim to a distinction so highly disproportioned to His social position.

XXVIII.

Considering the immense reputation acquired by Jesus in so brief a time, it is somewhat remarkable that so little, or rather nothing, should have been recorded of His bodily appearance. Particular accounts of His words, His actions, and his sufferings, are in our hands, notwithstanding the lapse of eighteen centuries, but we search in vain for any description of His features or other personal lineaments. That the more substantive contemporary arts, which have done so much even for ordinary celebrities, should have left without record the outward form and countenance of the most wonderful person who ever lived on earth is easily understood when we bear in mind the country of His birth and the nation whose customs formed the


mould of his existence as to material things. The very omission in literary records of such homage to paramount merit and vast renown, suggests the inference that our Saviour's appearance in the flesh was of the most ordinary kind, and wholly void of those external attractions, which so often command admiration, and serve to explain unusual influence or success. Moreover, there may have been, indeed most probably there was, a Divine intention in the refusal of these engaging qualities to Jesus. His mission was entirely spiritual; He proclaimed the resurrection of the body, it is true, but of the body *glorified*. He addressed Himself exclusively to the moral part of our nature, and it was by the purity, the comprehensiveness, and the benevolence of His doctrine that He endeavoured to regenerate and beatify mankind. It was, therefore, to the heart, not to the face; to the mind, not to the body, that we were to look for the representative expression of those great principles which lie at the bottom of Christianity, and constitute its crowning appeal to our faith. That He was supremely gifted in these

respects, there are many impressive indications. His preaching carried with it an authority which in sundry instances commanded a submissive attention before it obtained a conclusive assent. It is stated that He spoke '*as never man spake before.*' His manner was gentle, but significant and commanding ; His countenance, however plain, was, no doubt, susceptible of expression in all its varieties ; His voice, we cannot doubt, had suitable tones for any occasion ; the rebuke of His eye was terrible ; His compassion overflowed in tears. These particulars, though not formally set down, may be deduced incidentally from various passages in the New Testament. The reader need hardly be reminded that some of His earliest disciples forsook their previous employments and followed Him at once, as if His injunctions were the commands of power, and refusal to obey them a punishable offence.

XXIX.

Our next object of inquiry is the conduct of the Jewish youth thus remarkably circumstanced.

There are not two opinions about it : Evangelists and Apostles all agree in the same account of it. Opponents have found nothing in its private, nothing in its public, portion to censure or even to insinuate to its disadvantage. We have it on the authority of St. Luke that after the well-known scene in the Temple, Jesus '*went down with them* (his parents) *and was subject unto them.*' Let us bear in mind that when our Lord passed from His period of private into that of His public life, He was still at a susceptible age, alive to the passions of our nature, and at the same time exposed to the malignity of jealous or bigoted censurers. He came, nevertheless, out of that twofold ordeal unsullied by the breath of scandal, or, as far as we know, by the slightest rumour of an imputed weakness. The whole course of His ministry displayed an uniform tissue of the highest qualities conferred by the Almighty on mankind. Benevolence, unrivalled courage, humility, wisdom, charity in its broadest sense, devotion to the will of God, entire holiness, and a total absence of self, were manifest, as occasion served, in every word and



action of His life. Observe, moreover, the contrasts of quality exhibited in one individual, meekness and intrepidity, righteousness and humility, for instance, and finally the exhaustive union of virtues in a poor labourer of limited education, relying on Providence for his daily bread. Oh! what perfection of conduct and example! With a full knowledge of its attendant agonies He accepted a death of violence and shame, and even in the last excruciating hours, prayed for His tormentors, comforted the repentant thief, and bequeathed His mother to the loving care of a devoted adherent.

XXX.

And then the length, and breadth, and depth, and height of His doctrine,—a doctrine which harmonized the Mosaic law with the final revelation, which reconciled the Creator to His reasoning creation, and embraced a world without limitations of person, time, or space. The Gospel histories leave no doubt as to Christ's intimate acquaintance with the writings of the

Old Testament, with the Psalms of David, and the books of prophecy in particular. He evidently identified Himself with the Messiah of those Scriptures, but certainly not with the Messiah of their Pharisaical interpreters. The guidance of a Divine hand appears in this discrepancy. The contempt entertained by Scribe and Pharisee for so humble a claimant as Jesus Christ led to the atonement of the cross,—to the consummation of that sacrifice which was an essential part of the great scheme of redemption. It led also in part to that popular persuasion which was expressed by the title of King given by acclamation to Him who made His public entry into Jerusalem according to the language of the prophet: ‘Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek and sitting upon an ass, and a colt, the foal of an ass.’


While on this point of doctrine, I would call attention to a difference of no small importance between the tenets of the Old and those of the New Testament. In the former there was no distinct assurance of a second life, nothing which proclaimed a resurrection from the grave. This

is the more remarkable, because there is reason to believe that in leaving Egypt the Israelites were fully acquainted with the doctrines of the soul's immortality and man's responsibility hereafter. The temporal benefits of righteousness, that is, of strict obedience to the law, were alone assigned to the descendants of the patriarchs, to those who received in their persons the mark of Jehovah's covenant with Abraham. Prophecy, indeed; pointed to benefits which were to extend to the world of Gentiles by virtue of the Messiah's mission, and elsewhere a few detached passages of ancient scripture intimate the possibility of something to come hereafter, but they were not sufficiently patent to be identified with the blessings of Christianity.

XXXI.

Taking into view the other great forms of religion in this world of ours, we have no fear of finding the doctrine promulgated by Jesus overtopped by any one of them. Sceptics even have allowed that it leaves no room for any other

creed adapted to the spiritual wants of the human mind. In fact, it towers above all others in essential points. The only religion of wide adoption, established within the Christian era, is taken in a great degree from our canonical Scriptures. What is new in it has no foundation other than the assertions of its author. Far from having the breadth and depth of Christianity, its charities are restricted to those who profess it; it was propagated by the sword, and instead of having a spiritual self-denial for its platform, it had conquest and temporal power as means of success, and a carnal paradise for its ultimate attraction. Of the very few systematic, national religions which preceded the birth of Christ with the merit of repudiating idolatry, three only may be thought to have bid for the sanction of an express revelation. Egypt, Greece, and Rome had no religious system attributed to any known legislator. Confucius moved altogether in a moral and intellectual sphere. The pretensions of the Great Lama, whatever they were, may be left to the curiosity of travellers in the remote regions of



Tartary. Budh, Brahma, the Magi, and the Parsees, or worshippers of the sun, may be named as completing the catalogue. Of these the only teachers of high morality were the two first mentioned, and their theological creeds are too extravagant to command our respect. The Magi appear to have been little more than magicians, as the well-known term of magic would seem to imply. As for the Parsees, they worshipped the great source of light in our celestial system, and on that account are not likely to have asserted any claim to inspiration, though we may charitably suppose that the grand luminary was adored by them as an emblem of its Creator. It may occur to some one that, although in point of form rather than substance, the religious creed of Scandinavia ought not to be omitted here, but in truth the elements of that exploded mythology are too wild to require any argumentative notice.

XXXII.

Let us pause here awhile, and by means of a summary of what precedes bring into a more concentrated light the progress, if any, we have made towards the establishment of our intended conclusion. We hope to have shown that there is reasonable evidence of a Providential scheme for the ultimate redemption of mankind, dating from the earliest period of recorded time ; that as instruments for accomplishing the plan, an individual, a family, a race were selected ; that a nation springing from them was set and kept apart for the preservation of the true faith, as to worship, and also as to promise ; that prophets from among the same people successively announced the reign of a Messiah, descending from the stock of David and Abraham, and exhibiting certain characteristic features of body, mind, and condition, that in the fulness of time, by which is meant a time when circumstances, both social and political, concurred, as foreseen, to favour the fulfilment of the prophecies and the

propagation of a newly revealed faith ; that there appeared in the person of Jesus Christ an individual who, in all essential respects, answered to the prophetic anticipations, whose conduct, character, and doctrine, while consistent therewith, were marvellous each in itself, and still more marvellous in their combination ; and, finally, that taken as a whole, the circumstances are inexplicable on grounds of human agency. If this be a faithful statement resting on reasonable evidence, surely we cannot err in concluding that Jesus was a miracle Himself, independent of all external miracles attesting His truth, and that it was rational to rest on that conclusion without waiting for those ulterior proofs arising out of the spread and continuing progress of Christianity. If anything were still wanting to our argument, the fact, the undoubted fact, of the resurrection is more than enough to supply the defect. The Apostles believed in it. The Evangelists proclaimed it. The Christian world to this day relies upon it. St. Paul has stamped it with his clear, vigorous, uncompromising language. What are his words

when writing to the Corinthians? '*If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. . . . If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead and become the first-fruits of them that slept.*' If not for their belief in the resurrection, for what did many sacrifice even to the enduring of torture the enjoyments of their earthly life, and not unfrequently even that life itself? How came it that Paul, the persecutor of Christians, and Peter, the denier of Christ, braved every danger, endured every suffering, and resigned their lives in testimony of their belief in the truth and resurrection of Jesus?

XXXIII.

I descend from the Apostles to a noted sceptic of our own time and country, the late John Stuart Mill. In his posthumous writings, under the head of *Essays on Religion*, he bears a remarkable testimony, not indeed to the resurrection or divinity of Jesus, but to the unrivalled

perfection of His moral and intellectual qualities. In justice to Mr. Mill I quote his very words :—

‘About the life and sayings of Jesus there is a stamp of personal originality, combined with profundity of insight, which, if we abandon the idle expectation of finding scientific precision where something very different was aimed at, must place the Prophet of Nazareth, even in the estimation of those who have no belief in His inspiration, in the very first rank of the men of sublime genius of whom our species can boast. When this pre-eminent genius is combined with the qualities of probably the greatest moral reformer, and martyr to that mission, who ever existed upon earth, religion cannot be said to have made a bad choice in pitching on this man as the ideal representative and guide of humanity ; nor, even now, would it be easy, even for an unbeliever, to find a better translation of the rule of virtue from the abstract into the concrete than to endeavour so to live that Christ would approve of our life.’

XXXIV.

'It is finished,' were the last words of our expiring Redeemer. Was their meaning only that He acknowledged the presence of death? or was it not rather that He proclaimed the close of that sacrificial work for which He had resigned all the attractions of the world, and whereto He had devoted the entire energies of His dauntless soul? All that depended on His holy, self-denying conduct was achieved. He knew that His resurrection would follow, and that His reign of glory, supreme and endless, would at once begin. Was it natural, according to the ways of men, that power should spring out of poverty, splendour out of humility, and life out of death? Such, however, were the results of the conduct, character, and preaching of Jesus, one merely of mankind in outward appearance, of man unaided by worldly advantages, however conscious in Himself of that divinity, which could alone account for the consequences of His triumphant mission.

The triumph was not immediate. Time, more or less, intervened between the last woe-ful scene on Mount Calvary, and that great meeting of the Apostles which entailed the joint execution of their Lord's behests. It was not till after the ascension, and when on the day of Pentecost they were filled with the Holy Ghost, that they preached in public and braved the machinations of their priests and magistrates. For this they were threatened with death, and in fact were imprisoned and scourged; their boldness under every severe trial standing out in vivid contrast with the doubts and alarms which had prevailed among them at first. The chilling effect of the crucifixion was natural enough. The Shepherd had undergone a public execution. The sheep-dogs without their Master had other cares than the care of His flock. The wolves for a space were paramount. The knowledge which the Apostles had acquired of Jesus Himself in connexion with prophecy did not, in all probability, extend far among His more distant followers; and even the Apostles were liable to a transient recoil from faith under the pres-

sure of a great discouragement. The earlier disciples in their agitation of mind not improbably lost sight to a certain degree of their previous convictions, and what in an earthly sense might be called the posthumous acts of Jesus were necessary to accomplish the Divine purpose of His mission. Those acts were, nevertheless, constituent parts of His personal manifestation, and therefore interfering with my argument no more than did His recorded miracles and other testimonies to His divinity of a supernatural character. The Gospel, moreover, tells us that Christ Himself directed His disciples to retire into Galilee, and to wait for the manifestation of the Holy Spirit, which did not take place till after His ascension, the anniversary of which, as we all know, is still an object of special observance in our Church, if not in all the churches of Christendom. As the crowning incident of our Lord's ministerial appearance, it is manifestly entitled to a place in the personal constituents of that miraculous display of Divine power. In the days of His ministry He intimated His future resurrection

as well as His death upon the Cross, but in terms that were not at first understood by all who heard them. He also alluded beforehand to His subsequent ascension, though in words less positive, and consequently leaving more room for want of apprehension in His audience.

XXXV.

It was reserved for the day of Pentecost to commence a new phase in the great work of human salvation. The promise that a Comforter should be sent was then fulfilled. The Holy Ghost descended visibly on the assembled Apostles. He, from whom the Spirit came, was not present. His late disciples at once assumed a higher character. It became their duty to act. The Divine mission was committed to their hands. They were the authorised executors of the New Testament; but the will of Him for whom they had to act was their guide, and in the prosecution of my argument it remains for me to show in what manner and to what degree the powers they exercised, the faith they exhi-

bited, and the sufferings they underwent for their Master's sake, harmonised with His own individual testimonies, and contributed to the evidence of His miraculous character.

Let not the reader imagine that any preceding references to Scripture are meant to imply superior acquaintance on my part with its contents. Such references are unavoidable in an essay which treats of Jesus in His personal identity with the Messiah of prophecy; nor, indeed, are they many when compared with the whole amount of prophetic testimonies.

XXXVI.

To proceed—it so happens that our Church was only just now engaged in celebrating the anniversary of that memorable season when the Apostles, assembled at Jerusalem, took counsel together for the prosecution of their joint labour. The Holy Spirit having descended upon them in a visible shape, from that fulfilment of their Master's promise they derived fresh confidence and an energy equal to the obstacles they had

to overcome. Such is the Scriptural statement ; such was the belief of the earliest Christians ; such was that link in the Providential chain which formed the more immediate connexion of Jesus with His nascent Church. He no longer appeared to them in person ; but they, inspired by the promised Comforter, gave reality to that Name, which should cause every knee to bend, and made the Cross, which had been an instrument of humiliation and cruel agony, a word of triumph and a symbol of glory. Neither the Name nor the Cross were held up as objects of adoration. The former involves the special significance of *person*, having otherwise no more claim to distinction than a shadow possesses in right of the individual who projects it. Speaking of the Almighty, the psalmist has said, 'Praise *him* in his name *YAH*.' So it may be understood of the passage quoted in the last sentence—to Christ in His personal name of Jesus 'every knee shall bow.' The second person of the Trinity, acknowledged as such with few declared exceptions by the Christian world at large, is thus under the human name of Jesus

identified with the Church in the fullest sense of that word, as its head and essential principle. It is the person, revealed to mankind by that name, when clad with our nature on earth, who still to this hour marshals the progress of Christianity, and has His share of glory as an object of adoration by its votaries.

XXXVII.

It was that same working man of Palestine, with His doctrine of God-like proportions, co-extensive with the creation, who foretold that faith in Him was like that seed, which, however minute at first, would grow into a tree of the largest size. His prophetic words, as recorded with slight differences in three of the Gospels, are so remarkable that they may well find a place here.

St. Luke's version is very explicit. *'Then, said He, meaning Jesus, Unto what is the kingdom of God like, and whereunto shall I resemble it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took and cast into his garden; and it grew*

and waxed a great tree; and the fowls of the air lodged in the branches of it. Significant as the whole passage must be deemed, there are several expressions in it that more particularly fix the attention. 'A man,'—'his garden,'—'the fowls of the air.' Jesus Himself is the *man*. He calls Judea, the scene of His mission, *His* garden. *The fowls of the air* must surely be meant for the heathen, who, like wild birds, are to be found in all parts without being confined to any native locality. Here, if our interpretation be correct, we see the *Man*, Jesus, calling Judea *His* garden, as the Almighty Himself might have called the Promised Land after it had been taken possession of by the Israelites, other nations, without limit, being invited to enjoy the shelter of God's kingdom, designated by the figure of a great tree.

The entire passage displays foreknowledge on a far greater scale than in what related to the impending destruction of Jerusalem, as also predicted by our Lord.

Now it is a matter of permanent interest to inquire in what manner and to what degree

events have hitherto tallied with these prophecies. The nineteenth century of the Christian Era is drawing towards its close. How stands the *tree* with reference to the *seed*? Is it of vast overspreading size? Do the fowls of the air lodge in its branches? With regard to Jerusalem, we know on the evidence of innumerable eye-witnesses, that its ruins have proclaimed for centuries the truth of Christ's prediction. The progress of Christianity presents an outline less uniformly defined, nor could it well be otherwise in the very nature of things. Jerusalem fell under the stroke of hostile power, and its ruined condition was the immediate consequence of that fatality. The progress of Christianity extends over a vast length of time, and is still an unfinished and ever-active process. Our present scope is limited to a comparison of the actual spread of the *tree* with the smallness of its *seed* when first consigned to the earth. Those leading events, which stand like gigantic milestones on the intermediate spaces, may be fitly comprised in this view, nor would a notice of existing circumstances, pregnant with a fuller

accomplishment of our Christian hopes, be at all misplaced.

The Sermon on the Mount may fairly be taken for a starting-point. It was addressed to the twelve disciples. Numbers, nay, multitudes, from various parts of Syria, attracted by the cures and miracles performed by Jesus, were, no doubt, pressing with eager curiosity on His footsteps. Among them the good seed was to be cast, but those who had already thrown in their lot with Him were few. Even while the Divine mission was in progress, the number of real converts could hardly have exceeded a few thousands ; and of those, it is stated, that many receded from their faith on learning the full extent of the new doctrine. After the Ascension, and the wonders of Pentecost, three thousand souls were '*added*' to the number of believers, as stated in the third chapter of the Acts. The word '*added*' implies the existence of previous numbers, and the figure which follows that expression, having a certain tone of satisfaction, looks as if those numbers had been by comparison limited. Nevertheless, the fact is an assertion

of progress, which, by degrees, at short intervals, comes out historically in larger proportions. In the fourth chapter of Acts, in the fourth verse it is stated that *many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand.* Further on, in the fifth chapter there are these words, '*the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly, and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.*' Further on, in the fortieth verse, we read that when they (the council) had called the Apostles and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak '*in the name of Jesus,* and let them go.' They departed rejoicing, and '*daily in the temple and in every house they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.*'

XXXVIII.

Although the Acts of the Apostles extend not beyond the residence of Paul at Rome after he had preached to the Jews in that city, and been released by the authorities from a state of

positive restraint, they afford sufficient evidence of the progress of Christianity. The Church is described as having been established in several cities ; Gentiles were received into the brotherhood of Christ in common with the converted Jews ; every forward step was made in the name of Jesus ; preaching, baptism, miracles, were all performed in that name ; dangers were encountered, sufferings were endured, lives were resigned with patience, and even with exultation, for the same ; persecution seemed to give fresh vigour to the word.

The great persecution of Christians which stamped with infamy the latter years of Diocletian's reign, succeeded a period of tranquillity as respected them. Unhappily the same period was one in which their morality declined in proportion to the increase of their numbers and the diminution of their troubles. The multitudes of those who were tortured and put to death in various ways during several successive years in every part of the Roman empire, with the single exception of France, where Constantius, the father of Constantine, held the reins of govern-

ment, show to what extent the Christian population had increased in the beginning of the fourth century. The historical fact that Christian morality had not persevered in its early vigour at the time of the great persecution, appears to enhance the power of Christianity itself, considering the host of believers who never swerved from their faith to the last extremity of torment. Examples, we all know, are to be found in history of devotees to any worthless religion, and sometimes even of enthusiasts in a secular cause, who have displayed unflinching fortitude to the point of death itself from a mere impulse of voluntary zeal. But progress by numbers, not martyrdom, is the question here; and whether we look to the persecutions under Galerius and Diocletian, or moving onward in time to that most signal triumph of Christianity in the declared conversion of Constantine, we are forced to recognise the expansive growth of that tree which was rooted in the person and nourished by the blood of Jesus. To whatever immediate cause we may ascribe the great event, whether to policy or to conviction, the Christian population

throughout the territory of Rome must have been very considerable, and in all likelihood actively progressive to warrant or suggest so hazardous and unexpected a novelty. Let Gibbon himself be placed in the witness-box. What is the language of that splendid, sly, sarcastic writer? In the very first paragraph of his celebrated chapter on Christianity, the truth creeps out in these words: 'While that great body (the Roman Empire) was invaded by open violence, or undermined by slow decay, a pure and humble religion gently insinuated itself into the minds of men, grew up in silence and obscurity, derived new vigour from opposition, and, finally, erected the triumphant banner of the cross on the ruins of the capitol.' This, no doubt, is truth, though by no means truth in its fulness. There is light, but such light as the moon gives out from its crescent. To be just, however, there is more in the concluding part of the paragraph, which, nevertheless, it would be superfluous to transcribe in these pages.

XXXIX.

If the 'pure and humble' religion of Jesus had made so triumphant a march in the teeth of Pharisaic hostility and pagan persecution when Constantine ruled over the Roman Empire, what progress did it make both there and elsewhere in the succeeding centuries? Take, for instance, the age of Charlemagne, when the bishopric of Rome was invested for the first time with territorial possessions warranting the assumption of temporal sovereignty. Instead of a scattered sect more or less numerous, the whole population of Roman Europe had then been brought more or less to a knowledge of the Christian faith, and the same irrepressible doctrine had spread considerably among those barbarous tribes to whose repeated invasions the majesty of Rome had finally succumbed. It prevailed to a certain extent even in the Spanish peninsula, though it must be allowed that the armed invasions from Africa, stimulated by Islamite fanaticism, tended more and

more to contract that part of the territory occupied by Christians. In Africa and Egypt also, there was probably some diminution of the believers in Jesus. The balance, however, must have been very much in favour of the Gospel. In the British Isles, if the Danes still clung to a superstition of their own, the Saxons, the Britons, the Irish, and the Welsh, had adopted the pure religion which they still profess. The Greek empire, whether in Europe or in Asia, was also inhabited by Christians. It was the same in Armenia and Abyssinia, where Christianity had been introduced in the early years of the fourth century ; nor was the realm of Persia without a sprinkling of the precious seed.

XL.

Now let us take a more recent period, that, let us say for greater precision, of the Norman Conquest. What was the state—the *external* state of Christianity in the middle of the eleventh century ? In those countries, whether Roman, or, in the days of Roman supremacy

barbarous, where Christianity had obtained an entrance and gradual extension, the creed of Jesus was either acknowledged by the authorities, or personally accepted by a large and increasing population. Russia, Poland, Hungary, the three kingdoms of Scandinavia, and even the remoter Iceland, had received the inspired word. The armies of Christian Spain were gradually shunting off the Mahomedan invaders; the Greek empire, though beginning to shrink under the pressure of its Turkish conquerors, retained its form of Christian worship in the persons of its inhabitants, whom, as tributaries, the laws of Islam allowed the enjoyment of that inestimable privilege.

When Columbus discovered the Western continent and the fertile islands embosomed in its great Atlantic gulf, Christianity was so completely and securely established throughout the countries of Europe that its followers, counted by millions, had ample leisure for exploring its internal state, and breaking, alas! into hostile parties they revived from within those sanguinary persecutions which the Church

in earlier times had suffered from without. The missionaries, who went forth in the spirit of Apostles, found a vast field of savage life and idolatrous superstition where they could employ their spiritual energies with inexhaustible effect. Whatever mistakes they may have made in point of policy ; whatever cruelties they may have practised through excessive zeal ; to whatever degree the natives may have faded away in their transition from ignorance to knowledge, from the false to the true, the ground was cleared for establishing Christianity in the new-found world.

XLI.

One more leap and we approach the present period. As the interval is to be measured by centuries, so the increased number of Christians is to be reckoned by millions. Although in Europe the territorial area of Christendom had gained but little in extent during that time, advancing culture and settlement within its limits had greatly enlarged the habitable lands, and we

have not to learn what regions 'immeasurably spread' in America, Australia, and other long-hidden countries, are now occupied by a Christian population. An array of figures, however imposing to the eye, might well be deemed unnecessary here. Let it suffice to remind the reader that the British Isles alone, together with their neighbouring dependencies, contain an aggregation of nearly forty millions, differing in denomination, but all entertaining in common the faith of Jesus and Him crucified. Taken on a similar scale, the very names of Russia, France, Germany, and Italy, to say nothing of smaller states, may serve to convey an adequate idea of the enormous stride which Christianity has made since that memorable day when Peter heard the call of Jesus, and followed lovingly the steps of One who had not where to lay His head.

Among this host of scarcely numerable multitudes there are some—it may be many—whose minds are not satisfied with the amount of progress signalized above. They seem to question the truth of a doctrine, which, after so great a lapse of time, has left by far the larger portion

of mankind untouched by its purifying influence. The best of Christians, without partaking the doubt, may well regard with sorrow the powerful obstacles which remain to be overcome, before the whole of our race can be brought within the pale of their belief. But happily their regrets lie open to much consolatory hope. Reverting to the past, we have to bear in mind the character of those superstitious inventions which are so firmly and deeply rooted in the customs, the prejudices, the affections, the political institutions of the Eastern world. What general or lasting impression could a few detached missionaries, however zealous, bold, and persevering, be expected to make on so compact a mass of obstinate superstitions? We must not overlook the spiritual, self-denying principles of the Gospel, so utterly opposed to the ingrained habits and daily practices of a degraded, priest-ridden population. Islamism, with all the power of the sword, with all the attractions of self-indulgence, save only that of intoxicating drinks, found in its overmastering rush of fanatics an impassable barrier on the frontiers of China,

Tartary, and Russia ; its long successes in the Spanish peninsula terminated in its expulsion from that country ; and at this moment its political ascendancy in Turkey rests under the moral pressure of Christians subdued and dispossessed by the arms of a second Mahomet. The Apostles, in so far as we may infer from their occasional language, indulged in sanguine wishes, suggested naturally enough by their earnest convictions and unintermitting sacrifices ; but their Divine Master had by no means encouraged such eager expectations. He had even rebuked their premature curiosity when pressed directly by some of them upon His attention. Well, to us, the short-sighted, short-lived tenants of the earth, there is an oppressive depth in the retrospect of eighteen centuries, but what is twice that number of years compared with a futurity which has no end—the goal of our cherished faith—the home of our purest hopes ?

XLII.

Time even here has its share of the future, and we are assured on Scriptural authority that within its appointed limits belief in Christ will be universal on this our perishable globe. This prediction suggests a very interesting inquiry : How far do present appearances offer a reasonable prospect of its accomplishment ? It is only, of course, by conjecture that we can appreciate the probabilities, whatever they may be, of such an issue, which at all events can hardly be otherwise than more or less remote.

Let our investigation commence with the difficulties. It cannot be denied that the countries remaining to be converted are vastly extensive, and that their inhabitants, devoted to false religions, or having no religion at all, are to be counted by hundreds of millions. Whatever may be their denomination, whether Buddhists, or Brahmins, Parsees, or Confucians, they have in common a strong reluctance to adopt any new form of worship. For the most part to


attempt their conversion by ordinary means, however discreetly applied, is in no slight degree dangerous, and hitherto, when tried, for the most part unprofitable. On the other hand, great changes are in operation. Facilities for international intercourse are immensely increased. The pioneer of civilisation, commerce, founding its calculations on mutual wants, and enlightened by experience, penetrates the most repulsive communities, and, together with the interests of mankind, enlists their best feelings in the cause of peace and of general goodwill. Science, whose progress of late has been so eminently displayed, is never weary of bringing to light the hidden treasures of Nature, and thereby encouraging the hope of new solutions and unwonted combinations, tending to remove doubts and reconcile mysteries to the human understanding. Could anything be more wonderful, more unexpected, more suggestive, than the invention of the electric telegraph, followed by its application to oceanic uses? Nations thus brought nearer to each other; their communications multiplied;

their mutual dependence increased, must surely be liable to deeper impressions reciprocally transmitted. If this be so, of the two parties the one which has the resources of civilisation at command is pretty sure to have the ascendant, and sooner or later to impress the advantage of its knowledge on the other. The pride of race, and with it the obduracy of opinion, may be expected to soften in the light of that superiority, and the illusions of superstition will finally lose their hold upon minds no longer hardened by thoughtless ignorance and stubborn self-confidence. Christianity, be it remembered, in practice as in principle, embraces more especially the interests of the masses, and offers consolation to all who have found no footing in the prosperous ranks of society. The chief internal obstacles to its reception are certain points of theology and supernatural facts which are opposed to the general course of human experience. But those indelible evidences which in earlier ages brought the barbarians of Europe into a firm reliance on the Gospel may operate ultimately with equal force on Asiatic minds,

prepared by previous events and enlarged by a judicious system of instruction.

XLIII.

The just and liberal course of policy on which the British Government have entered in their Indian possessions can hardly fail to undermine those prejudices of caste and superstitious observances which nothing but slavish credulity, fixed by inveterate habit, could have retained so long. A growing sense of national independence, a truer appreciation of our legal principles, a more cordial intermixture between the native and the foreigner, seem already to open the road to religious as well as to social improvements. The railway, the power of steam, the force of electricity, are slaves more active and efficient than those of the magic lamp. We fly where we used to creep; we dictate where we used to sue; the barriers of Nature fall down before our engineers; we now reach distances to which we could only point some years ago. Is it, then, unreasonable to presume that the moral separations will yield



in time to the same law of progress in continuity which we recognise in other departments? The North, the South, and the West are all telling back upon the East with a resistless superiority in arms, in arts, in all the elements of success. Russia is clearing the way into Central Asia with words of peace and benevolence on her banner; Austria has sent out ships of discovery; France has regained her footing in India; Sultans and Shahs, Khedives and Seyids, have made in person the tour of Christendom; Turkish armies have been paid by England, and commanded by British officers; Paris and London have opened their schools for the instruction of Turkish youths; Peking has been occupied by troops from England and France; Abyssinia and parts of Africa have been conquered by the former; the slave-trade itself, or rather the resolution to suppress it, is marshalling the way to a great revolution in the last, as yet, untameable land. In short, the symptoms of change, the means of extending civilisation, the forerunners of a happier state of things in regions hitherto impervious to the best forms of

government, and to the purest doctrines of religion, concur in holding out a hope which the philanthropist may cherish with pleasure, and the Christian with the full confidence of faith.

XLIV.

America, in its entire surface, and other countries, like Australia and New Zealand, which have been settled from Europe, may be left to relate their own story. Experience tells us that their respective inhabitants imported from without, increase and multiply, while the original savages gradually die out and disappear. What need is there to add that the surviving and multiplying population, probably in time overflowing, is, though the denominations may vary, Christian ?

These latter circumstances bear a character of certainty in so far as anything in this planet of ours can be deemed certain. In countries of great extent inhabited by a growing population, the growth of Christianity in point of numbers can hardly fail to realize our ex-

pectations. The prospects which are shadowed out in the paragraphs immediately preceding are manifestly conjectural. Some, indeed, may deem them to be of too sanguine a character. To those, however, who rely on the Saviour's veracity, they gather force even as simple possibilities from the prediction attributed in the Gospel to that Divine authority : predictions, be it remembered, already in part fulfilled. The very slowness and occasional interruptions of progress hitherto experienced, might be viewed as giving a tone of consistency to a future obstructed in its course by many difficulties, but promising in many respects to be ultimately triumphant over all misgivings, however natural, over all objections, however plausible. The rooted superstitions and inveterate prejudices of the Eastern world must of necessity encounter many a rude shock, many a violent inroad, while the work of open conquest or insidious encroachment from the West is more or less in operation. But success, security, and settlement, following in natural sequence wherever superior civilization is the invader, lead in their turn to kinder

methods of treatment, and interest leagued with reason acts by milder rules than those of military force. Jesus did not rely on miracles alone for the reception of His doctrines by the people to whom He announced them. Acts of personal relief, the restoration of the sick to health, of the blind to sight, of the lame to activity, were the heralds of that truth which He promulgated, and faith in which was the passport to a state of everlasting happiness. The zealous missionary, who practises the healing art in addition to the qualities of discretion and disinterestedness, may be sure of engaging the sympathies, and has the best chance of mastering the minds of those whom he seeks to convert. This advantage would, no doubt, be vastly increased if governments in due season were to employ the same powers in the cause of Christianity. The diffusion of Scriptural knowledge favoured in latter years by translations of the Bible into a multitude of languages and dialects may be fairly expected to open a passage for the great work and to promote its final accomplishment. The Royal Visit now

in progress may possibly throw its hopeful influence into the scale.

XLV.

Here ends my argument. May I not assume with reasonable confidence that I have shown sufficient grounds for asserting that *Jesus Himself is the greatest of miracles?* He has passed under our contemplation exclusively in His human form. It is simply the man Jesus with whom we have dealt in His several relations to social life, to prophecy, to His spiritual ministry, to the surviving prevalence of His Name, and the chequered, but never-ceasing progress of His creed. In this consistent, though diversified picture, His figure stands out in such utter contrast with all that comes within the range of our experience, that judging by the rule of cause and effect, we must resort for explanation to a higher power than any our nature possesses. It must be confessed that the finger of God is visible throughout. Conceive the baby-tenant of a manger, the son of a Jewish

workman, in youth subject to his humble parents, in manhood earning His daily bread by toil, undistinguished, as far as we know, from His fellows of like station, bursting forth while still young into the splendour of that perfect, unsullied, commanding character, exhibited by word and act in the records of His time. 'He spake as never man spake;' He inspired at once both love and awe. In respect of mind and of person, He was the Messiah of prophecy. He gave His life for mankind, and the spirit of that life still glows in the hearts of millions. On earth He was '*despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief*;' in heaven He is now the '*Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the Prince of peace*.' What more can be said? Jesus Himself is the greatest of miracles.

XLVI.

Let not the sceptic, who stumbles at some superficial difficulties, rest in proud reliance on his superior sagacity. Let not the philosopher

imagine that truth is nowhere but in his computations of time, and his electric or chemical discoveries. Let not the Gibbons of literature sneer at convictions which filled such minds as those of a Bacon, a Newton, or a Locke. It is not in religion alone that views of comprehensive significance absorb all minor objections and satisfy the demands of reason which the senses fail to bring within the grasp of their conception. More or less, perhaps in all things, there is a master principle, the perception of which overrules all secondary points. The statesman of large mind, the statesman worthy of his name, appeals to that principle, and calls in the past and the future to control the local objections raised against some imperial measure by those who only judge by parts, and see in every hillock a more than Alpine chain; but especially in matters of religion, that holy bridge between the material and the invisible worlds, does this comparative predominance prevail; and I venture to assert that in no part of its unlimited domain, can a stronger instance of the truth be found than in the personal miracle of

Jesus, which I have endeavoured to display in its full light.

The reader, I trust, will bear in mind, and I can hardly repeat it too often, that Jesus of Nazareth in His human person and social circumstances only is the dominant figure brought in these pages into view. Looking to other religious legislators of world-wide note, I would ask whether among them all there is one who, in those respects alone, can approach to an equality with Him. As far as we can gather from the mists of fabling antiquity in countries emerging from barbarism, each of them in different ways enjoyed advantages of a personal or social kind to which our Lord was utterly a stranger. They had perils to encounter, and obstacles to surmount. But either by birth, by noble connexions, by general learning, or by court favour, assisting their pretensions to a Divine guidance ; or, as particularly in the case of Buddha, by a pure system of morals, they obtained the desired degree of credit, and ended by bequeathing to multitudes a creed of their own invention. With respect to that one form

of religious faith which had its origin long after the establishment of Christianity, and which is still subsisting among numbers in sundry parts of our elder world, its author combined in his person the prestige of birth and powerful connexions amongst a population of idolaters, open to purer impressions, and swayed by traditions capable of being turned to account for their reception, together with knowledge derived from practical intercourse with other nations, Jews and Christians inclusive. He had, moreover, the resources of a wealthy marriage, the charm of personal attractions, the influence of an eloquent tongue, and, above all, the sword's unsparing edge, driven home with Arabian energy, and clearing the road to unlimited dominion, and the indulgence of our most seductive passions.

XLVII.

Surely I do not err in asserting that the circumstances and evidences which constitute the whole of my argument afford, when taken collectively, adequate grounds of Christian faith

apart from those which, however true, have given birth to doubts, to angry disputes, to painful heart-burnings, even to lasting disputes in the very bosom of the Church.

XLVIII.

Among the peculiarities of Christ's doctrine there yet remains one of striking importance which ought not to be omitted. Religions which pretend to attach the perpetuity of truth to human institutions, only pass sentence on their own capacity for the retention of power while bound up with them. A mutable nature implies the necessity of occasional change, and all political institutions, as they partake of that nature, must sooner or later bend to necessity. With the exception of baptism and the Lord's Supper, if indeed in them altogether, those who accept the faith of Christ are not tied down to any precise or detailed forms. Their duties are derived from general principles. It is the spirit, the purity of motive, the earnestness of purpose, that gives essential value to the

performance of these duties. The mode is a secondary consideration, to be regulated as circumstances may require. Hence it follows that the doctrine itself is universal and indestructible. It has no Caaba, no temple, no local centre of exclusive sanctity. Like the air we breathe, it envelopes all. Its source is in heaven ; its earthly seat is the heart of man.

Once more, in conclusion, I repeat with all humility, but also with confirmed confidence, that *Jesus Himself is the greatest of miracles.*

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